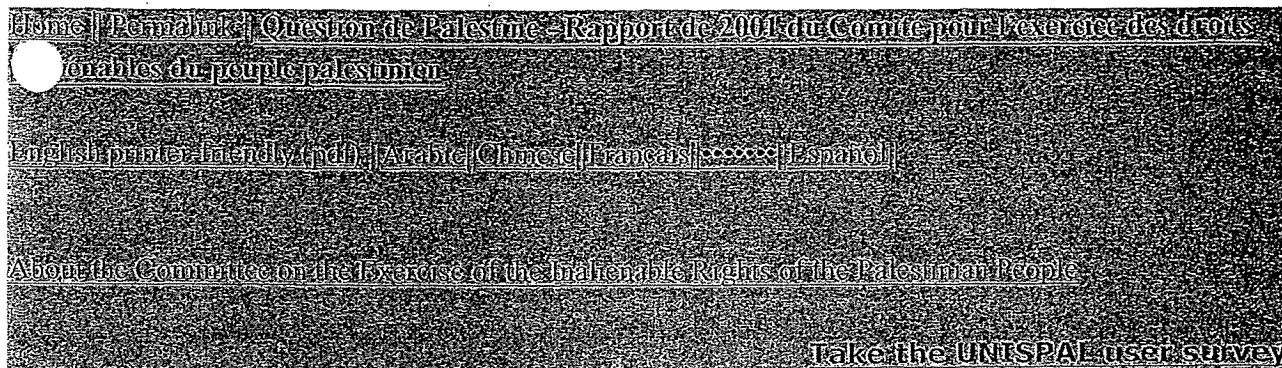


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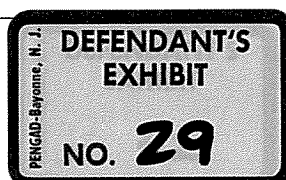
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Report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People

Note

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Letter of transmittal

10 October 2001

Mr. Secretary-General,

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The second half of the twentieth century was marked by the struggle of the Palestinian people for the exercise of its fundamental and natural rights. For the past 50 years, the United Nations has been closely involved in and has remained in the forefront of international efforts aimed at resolving the question of Palestine - the core of the conflict in the Middle East. For its part, the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People, since its inception in 1975, has continued to work towards the exercise by the Palestinian people of their inalienable rights, namely the right to self-determination without external interference; the right to national independence and sovereignty; and the right to return to their homes and property. The Committee's many activities in implementation of the mandate given to it by the General Assembly continue to be devoted to the achievement of this important objective until the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people are realized in their entirety.

The decade since the Middle East Peace Conference held at Madrid and the beginning of the Oslo peace process has considerably altered the political environment of the Middle East. The parties to the conflict appeared to have succeeded in breaking out of a shell of age-old suspicion and mistrust and to have dedicated themselves to a single goal of attaining a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in their region. The past year, however, has witnessed yet another dramatic and rapid deterioration of the situation on the ground and a complete halt in the peace process. The international community was greatly appalled by the outbreak of violence and the tragic loss of life following the events at Al-Haram al-Sharif that took place in September 2000. The Al-Aqsa intifada has continued throughout the year. These events have seized the attention of the international community, including the General Assembly and the Security Council and our Committee. It was disappointing and frustrating, after 10 gruelling years of peace negotiations, to see the momentum of the peace process wither away.

The Committee fully supports your dedicated and hard work for peace in the Middle East. We have welcomed your intense efforts in the course of the year aimed at bringing the two sides together and salvaging the peace process. The Committee remains hopeful that your leadership will enable the parties to overcome the present difficulties and return to the negotiating table.

In the hope that our Committee's endeavours will make a meaningful contribution to the deliberations of the General Assembly, I have the honour to enclose herewith the report of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People for submission to the General Assembly in accordance with paragraph 5 of its resolution 55/52 of 1 December 2000. The report covers the period from 11 October 2000 to 10 October 2001.

Accept, Sir, the assurances of my highest consideration.

(Signed) Papa Louis Fall
Chairman of the Committee on the
Exercise of the Inalienable Rights
of the Palestinian People

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I. Introduction

1. The Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was established by the General Assembly by resolution 3376 (XXX) of 10 November 1975, with the task of recommending a programme designed to enable the Palestinian people to exercise its inalienable rights as recognized by the Assembly in resolution 3236 (XXIX) of 22 November 1974.

2. The recommendations made by the Committee in its first report to the General Assembly¹ were endorsed by the Assembly as a basis for the solution of the question of Palestine. In its subsequent reports,² the Committee has continued to stress that a comprehensive, just and lasting solution to the question of Palestine, the core of the Arab-Israeli conflict, must be based on the relevant United Nations resolutions and the following essential principles: the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967, including Jerusalem, and from the other occupied Arab territories; respect for the right of all States in the region to live in peace within secure and internationally recognized boundaries; and the recognition and exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination. The Committee's recommendations could not be implemented, and the Assembly each year renewed the Committee's mandate and requested it to intensify efforts in pursuit of its objectives.

The Committee welcomed the historic breakthrough in the peace process in 1993 and the subsequent important steps towards the achievement of a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, based on Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). At the same time, the Committee continued to work towards the full realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, including the right to self-determination and to its own independent State. The Committee also continued to mobilize the needed international assistance and solidarity during the transitional period.

4. In the course of the past year, the situation in the region has been marked by the eruption of the Palestinian intifada in protest over the highly provocative visit of the then opposition leader Ariel Sharon to the Al-Haram al-Sharif compound in the Old City of Jerusalem. The year of violent confrontations left hundreds of civilians dead, mostly among Palestinians, and tens of thousands of wounded and permanently disabled, including hundreds of children. The Committee noted that the explosive situation on the ground had been further exacerbated by the rapid deterioration of the Palestinian economy, the dispossessing effects of the Israeli settlement policy and protracted internal and external closures of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee, therefore, joined the international community in stressing the need for the Government of Israel to fulfil its legal obligations under the Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, of 12 August 1949 (the Fourth Geneva Convention)³ and Security Council resolutions. The Committee also reaffirmed that continued failure on the part of Israel to live up to the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention would cause even greater suffering and dispossession to the Palestinian people and would lead to an increased volatility in the entire region.

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5. The peace process has remained stalemated since the beginning of 2001. In October-November 2000, the Committee observed with much hope the efforts by various parties in Paris, at Taba and Sharm el-Sheikh to end the violence and resume the peace negotiations. The Committee noted in that regard the key role played in these endeavours by the United States of America, Egypt, Jordan and the European Union (EU). It welcomed, fully supported and was particularly appreciative of the increased engagement in the course of the year of the Secretary-General of the United Nations. The Committee was hopeful that the understandings reached by the parties at Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba, Egypt, in October 2000 and January 2001, respectively, would result in curbing and eventually stopping the violence and the return of the two sides to the negotiating table. The establishment in November 2000 of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, led by former United States Senator George Mitchell, was a promising step aimed at resolving the crisis on the ground. It appeared that the sensible and balanced recommendations made by the Mitchell Committee in its report, released in late April 2001, offered a practicable way out of the impasse. Most importantly, both sides have accepted them. However, the Israeli insistence that all violence should cease before the cooling-off period begins and negotiations resume prevented the two sides from breaking out of the deadlock. Subsequent attempts at resuming security cooperation between the two sides, notably the June 2001 proposal by the United States Director of Central Intelligence, also remained inconclusive. A September 2001 meeting at Gaza International Airport between the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Yasser Arafat and Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Shimon Peres was a welcome development and created new expectations of an imminent breakthrough. They agreed to resume security cooperation, take measures to sustain the ceasefire and bring the violence under control. The Committee hoped that the strict adherence by the two sides to the agreed terms and the sustained security coordination work would lead to positive changes on the ground, creating the necessary momentum for the resumption of the peace process. The Committee also welcomed and was greatly encouraged by the statement made on 2 October 2001 by the United States President George Bush concerning the Palestinian State.

6. The aforementioned setbacks notwithstanding and as the crisis persisted, the Committee expressed the view that a stepped-up and more involved assistance of key international actors, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, was warranted in order to help the parties implement the Mitchell Committee recommendations, stop the violence and resume the peace negotiations. As the organ of the General Assembly mandated to deal with the question of Palestine, the Committee during the year has strongly supported all multilateral initiatives aimed at ensuring a de-escalation on the ground and a speedy return of the two sides to the resumption of the peace negotiations.

II. Mandate of the Committee

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The mandate of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was again renewed by the General Assembly in its resolution 55/52 of 1 December 2000, in which the Assembly, inter alia: (a) endorsed the conclusions and recommendations of the Committee⁴ and

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requested it to continue to keep under review the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to report and make suggestions to the Assembly or the Security Council, as appropriate; (b) authorized the Committee to continue to exert all efforts to promote the exercise of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people and to report thereon to the Assembly at its fifty-sixth session and thereafter; and (c) requested the Committee to continue to extend its cooperation and support to Palestinian and other non-governmental organizations in order to mobilize international solidarity and support for the achievement by the Palestinian people of its inalienable rights and for a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine.

8. In its resolution 55/53 of 1 December 2000, on the Division for Palestinian Rights of the United Nations Secretariat, the General Assembly requested the Secretary-General to continue to provide the Division with the necessary resources and to ensure that it continues to carry out its programme of work as detailed in the relevant earlier resolutions, including, in particular, the organization of meetings in various regions with the participation of all sectors of the international community, the further development and expansion of the documents collection of the United Nations Information System on the Question of Palestine, the preparation and widest possible dissemination of publications and information materials on various aspects of the question of Palestine, and the provision of the annual training programme for staff of the Palestinian Authority.

9. In its resolution 55/54 of 1 December 2000, on the special information programme on the question of Palestine, the General Assembly requested the Department of Public Information of the United Nations Secretariat, in full cooperation and coordination with the Committee, to continue, with the necessary flexibility as may be required by developments affecting the question of Palestine, its special information programme for the biennium 2000-2001; and to promote the Bethlehem 2000 Project, within existing resources and until the Bethlehem commemoration comes to a close, including the preparation and dissemination of publications, audio-visual material and further development of the "Bethlehem 2000" site on the United Nations Internet home page.

10. In carrying out its programme of work, the Committee also took into account General Assembly resolution 55/55 of 1 December 2000, in which the Assembly, inter alia, reaffirmed the necessity of achieving a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine in all its aspects; expressed its full support for the ongoing peace process; stressed the necessity for commitment to the principle of land for peace and the implementation of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973), which form the basis of the Middle East peace process; and stressed the need for the realization of the inalienable rights of the Palestinian people, primarily the right to self-determination; the need for the withdrawal of Israel from the Palestinian territory occupied since 1967; and the need for resolving the problem of the Palestine refugees.

III. Organization of work

A. Membership and officers

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11. The Committee is composed of the following Member States: Afghanistan, Belarus, Cuba, Cyprus, Guinea, Guyana, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Madagascar, Malaysia, Maldives, Malta, Namibia, Nigeria, Pakistan, Romania, Senegal, Sierra Leone, South Africa, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.

12. At its 256th meeting, on 1 March 2001, the Committee re-elected Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal) as Chairman, and re-elected Mr. Bruno Eduardo Rodríguez Parrilla (Cuba) and Mr. Ravan A. G. Farhâdi (Afghanistan) as Vice-Chairmen, and Mr. Walter Balzan (Malta) as its Rapporteur.

13. At the same meeting, the Committee adopted its programme of work for the year 2001.⁵

14. At its 258th meeting, on 18 September 2001, the Committee elected by acclamation Mr. Papa Louis Fall (Senegal) as Chairman, replacing Mr. Ibra Deguène Ka (Senegal), former Chairman of the Committee, who had retired from the diplomatic service of his country.

B. Participation in the work of the Committee

15. As in previous years, the Committee reconfirmed that all States Members and permanent observers to the United Nations wishing to participate in the work of the Committee as observers were welcome to do so. In accordance with established practice, the Permanent Observer of Palestine participated in the work of the Committee as an observer, attended all its meetings and made observations and proposals for consideration by the Committee and its Bureau.

16. In 2001, the Committee again welcomed as observers all the States and organizations that had participated in its work in the preceding year.⁶

IV. Review of the situation relating to the question of Palestine

17. In accordance with its mandate, the Committee continued to follow closely the situation relating to the question of Palestine and to monitor the situation in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee also continued to follow closely the various developments relevant to the peace process following the breakdown in the Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiations. The Committee has been particularly worried by the protracted stalemate in the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations, grievous difficulties experienced by the parties in trying to restore the peace process, escalation of violence on the ground and Israel's illegal occupation policies and practices.

Throughout the year, the Committee remained hopeful that the peace talks, which had been suspended since late January 2001, would resume. This, however, has not happened, owing to the position on the peace negotiations taken by the new Israeli Government and the continuing violence in

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the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem. The Al-Aqsa intifada, as it became known in 2000-2001, had three distinctive characteristics: the rapid escalation of the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) operations against the Palestinians; the introduction of a policy of targeted extrajudicial assassinations of Palestinian leaders and activists; and the frequent incursions into areas under full Palestinian control.

19. Since the beginning of the intifada, over 660 Palestinians have been killed by the IDF, security forces and settlers. Some 20,000 Palestinians have been wounded, a great number of them left permanently disabled. In monitoring the situation on the ground on a daily basis, the Committee, on several occasions, voiced its grave concern at the severity of the Israeli military response to the outbreak of Palestinian protest. The Committee noted that during the year, in addition to the use of plastic, rubber-coated metal and live ammunition, the Israeli military, in their attacks against Palestinians, continued to rely on heavy and sophisticated weapons, using them in an excessively harsh and indiscriminate manner. In the course of the past several months, the Committee has noted the alarmingly frequent use by IDF of helicopter gunships, air-to-surface and heavy anti-tank missiles, tanks and missile boats throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. On 18 May 2001, the Government of Israel changed the nature and scale of the conflict by authorizing the use of fighter aircraft against unprotected Palestinian targets. The Committee joined the international community in condemning these and subsequent air attacks as excessive, disproportionate and indiscriminate. The Committee also expressed the view that this policy was contrary to the accepted norms of international law. The new policy escalated the violence threatening to expand the conflict.

20. In the course of the past several months, the Israeli security apparatus has resorted to selective assassinations of Palestinian activists and political leaders. The methods used in these Government-authorized operations have varied from special undercover units and snipers to helicopter gunship-fired air-to-surface missiles and other high-tech means. In this regard, the Committee noted with special concern the public statements by some Israeli leaders openly calling for the "liquidation" of the fathers of Palestinian militants. Since December 2000, more than 50 Palestinians have been killed in targeted attacks. These political assassinations often claimed the lives of innocent bystanders, including children. The practice has prompted the international community's immediate and unequivocal condemnation. The Committee stated that the policy of targeted extrajudicial killings of Palestinian officials by Israeli security forces clearly violated the provisions of the Fourth Geneva Convention and was criminal in nature. The Committee has also received information on continued beatings and other abuse by IDF soldiers, Israeli border police officers and security forces of Palestinian civilians, ranging in age from 3 to 58.

21. Since April 2001, the Committee has observed with great concern what appeared to be an emerging pattern of Israeli incursions into areas under full Palestinian control. The Committee has stated that this type of IDF operations constituted an illegal activity and violated the letter and the spirit of the bilateral agreements signed as part of the peace process. During these massive incursions, IDF was supported by tanks, heavy armoured vehicles, helicopter gunships and bulldozers. The incursions constituted a virtual reoccupation of Palestinian lands, accompanied by the destruction of public and private property in various Palestinian towns, villages and refugee camps, including Beit Jala, Hebron, Jenin, Jericho, Khan Yunis, Qalqilya, Rafah, Ramallah, Tulkarm and others. The Committee considered a blatant provocation

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the taking over on 10 August 2001 of Orient House in East Jerusalem and nine other Palestinian offices in Abu Dis and Al-Eizariyeh, east of the city. Besides being illegal and provocative, this act was aimed at accelerating the process of Judaization of the city - the policy which Israel has been pursuing since 1967. In a simultaneous incursion that took place on 18 September 2001, in the north and south of the Gaza Strip, Israeli tanks and a bulldozer drove into an area south of Gaza City where a seaport was under construction, tearing down the fence and destroying the premises of the seaport project funded by the Governments of the Netherlands and France. The Committee was concerned about the official statements by Israeli leaders indicating Israel's intent to continue incursions into Areas "A".

22. During the year, the Israeli authorities have considered "unilateral separation" schemes aimed at further isolating Palestinian population centres from the settlements and restricting the movement of Palestinians throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. The Committee was much alarmed by the establishment, in late September 2001, of a 30-kilometre-long "closed military zone" in the northern part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory, stretching from Jenin to Tulkarm. In the Committee's view, this was an extremely provocative unilateral measure, taken by IDF in gross violation of the signed Israeli-Palestinian agreements. The Committee expressed much concern at the adverse implications this development might have for future talks on permanent status issues. Also in late September 2001, Israel's Ministry of Public Security announced an intention to consider physically separating the settlements of "Pisgat Ze'ev" and "Neve Ya'akov", north of East Jerusalem, from the Shu'fat refugee camp and the nearby Palestinian village of Dahiyat al-Bareed, respectively. The plan of the Jerusalem District police was to erect up to 12 kilometres of fences, a fortification that would include night-vision equipment and other high-tech defences. The Committee strongly opposed this policy, as it represented a new form of collective punishment and created another obstacle to efforts aimed at resolving the crisis.

23. In the period under review, as the crisis persisted, the Committee has observed with great hope and anticipation the intensive efforts mounted by various international parties to hold violence in check, achieve a viable ceasefire and hold it long enough to reach a political solution. To this end, Israeli and Palestinian leaders met with a number of world leaders and the Secretary-General of the United Nations. A series of meetings held in Paris were followed by an important summit at Sharm el-Sheikh, which was not attended by the Prime Minister of Israel. A way out of the escalating violence and towards the resumption of the peace negotiations was offered through the setting up, on 7 November 2000, of the Sharm el-Sheikh Fact-Finding Committee, headed by former United States Senator George Mitchell. At the start of 2001, the international community made another effort to persuade the two sides to bring about an end to violence, to protect civilians and to resume negotiations. The two sides met at Taba in late January 2001 and agreed on a number of understandings with respect to the situation on the ground and in the peace process. They also achieved a measure of progress by narrowing some gaps on core issues such as refugees, Jerusalem, borders and security. The peace negotiations were suspended in early February, however, following elections in Israel and the refusal of the new Israeli Government to respect the understandings reached at Sharm el-Sheikh and Taba. As the situation continued to escalate, the Mitchell Committee, on 30 April 2001, released a report putting forward a set of practical recommendations the parties should comply with in order to end confrontation and return to the negotiations. The international community expressed renewed hope that both sides, having accepted the

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report's recommendations, would be in a position to implement them in their entirety. The position of the Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People was that a confidence-building phase that would bring about a sustainable ceasefire was key to ending the confrontation. In this context, the Committee deplored the Israeli Government's tactic of using isolated incidents of violence as a pretext for delaying its compliance with the Mitchell Committee recommendations, such as the freeze on settlement activity. The Palestinian Rights Committee has also emphasized that a concrete framework for the implementation of the recommendations and an independent mechanism for monitoring compliance were urgently needed. Security cooperation between the two sides was perceived as vital for achieving a ceasefire. Several attempts have been made during the year at resuming security cooperation between the two sides, including the proposal made in June 2001 by the United States Director of Central Intelligence, which the Israeli side refused to implement by insisting on a seven-day total ceasefire. The Committee welcomed the visit of the Secretary-General to the region in June 2001 and, in particular, the important meetings he had with the Israeli and Palestinian leadership. The Committee also remained hopeful that the intensified involvement of the co-sponsors of the peace process, EU, regional leaders and the Secretary-General of the United Nations was a most workable way to secure an end to the violence, build confidence and move back to the peace negotiations. As the parties remained deadlocked, the Committee called upon the wider international community to help them out of the impasse. At a meeting between the Chairman of the Executive Committee of the Palestine Liberation Organization and President of the Palestinian Authority Mr. Yasser Arafat and Israel's Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr. Shimon Peres, held on 26 September 2001 at Gaza International Airport, the parties discussed their respective actions that would allow them to maintain the ceasefire. In particular, they reiterated their commitment to the Mitchell Report recommendations and the understandings reached earlier in the year with the assistance of the United States Director of Central Intelligence. They also agreed to resume full security cooperation, exert maximum effort to sustain the ceasefire and carry out their respective obligations emanating from previous agreements. Israel pledged to lift closures and redeploy its forces. The Committee welcomed the results of the meeting and the renewal of security coordination and hoped that it would lead to a reduction of violence, restoration of trust between the two sides and the resumption of serious negotiations on key political issues.

24. A major obstacle to the peace process has been the persistence with which the Israeli authorities have been expanding the illegal settlements and infrastructure in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. According to the reports available to the Committee, Israel continued its settlement, outpost and road network construction throughout the area in disregard of the strong opposition to such activities expressed by the international community. There has been an alarming increase in the demolitions of Palestinian houses and other property in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Also, most of the IDF incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas were accompanied by the indiscriminate and often massive bulldozing of Palestinian property, both public and private, under various security-related justifications. The Gaza Strip suffered the most from these massive demolitions. In the period from the beginning of the intifada to 12 September 2001, IDF demolished a total of 559 Palestinian residential buildings. In East Jerusalem alone, some 30 Palestinian houses were demolished. A total of 3,669 residential buildings were shelled. In the same period, 112,900 olive trees were uprooted and 3,669,000 square miles of cultivated land destroyed. At least 15 settlement sites have been established or resettled anew in the West Bank since February 2001. Throughout the year, tenders have

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been issued by the Israeli authorities for the construction of settler housing in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem. In November 2000, tenders were issued for the construction of 131 housing units in the settlement of "Pisgat Ze'ev", north of East Jerusalem, and for 110 units in "Har Homa", at Jabal Abu Ghneim, south of East Jerusalem; in the same month, Israel's Ministry of Construction and Housing issued tenders for road and infrastructure construction at "Betar Ilit" near Bethlehem. In December 2000, the Israeli Minister of Housing and Construction announced that 1,400 housing units had been started since January of that year. Half of the tenders issued by the Israel Land Administration were earmarked for construction in settlements. For May 2001 alone, tenders were issued for the construction of more than 700 new homes in the West Bank.

25. According to the "Council of Jewish Communities in Judea, Samaria and Gaza", during 2001, the number of settlers in the occupied West Bank and the Gaza Strip has increased by 17,000 and has now reached nearly 227,000. Violence against the Palestinian population and acts of vandalism against their land and other property perpetrated by extremist settlers remained of special concern to the Committee. Individual armed settlers and radical settler groups continued to terrorize and assault Palestinians. Since the start of the intifada, settlers have killed 16 Palestinian civilians. Under the protection or due to indifference on the part of IDF, settler groups often resort to the use of firearms, hit-and-run incidents, torture and beatings of Palestinians. The arsenal of their illegal and criminal activities includes the obstruction of Palestinian road traffic and setting up roadblocks, throwing stones at Palestinian cars, setting Palestinian property on fire, uprooting trees, attacking Palestinian medical crews and journalists, and burning Palestinian places of worship. They have routinely occupied Palestinian land, establishing illegal temporary structures and outposts. In several areas of the West Bank, settlers have instituted armed patrols. IDF has made its opposition to this particular activity clear, but appears to have done nothing to stop it. In late August 2001, monitors of the Temporary International Presence in Hebron (TIPH) became the object of harassment and violence by Hebron settlers, who have disrupted its operation, forcing the TIPH contingent to scale back its regular patrols of the city. The Committee was seriously alarmed by the dramatic increase in the course of the year of the scope and intensity of settler violence against Palestinian civilians. It has always reiterated that the presence and the activities of the settlers in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, were illegal and violated the established norms of international humanitarian law, including article 49, paragraph 6, of the Fourth Geneva Convention.

26. The Committee remained much concerned about the plight of some 2,500 Palestinian prisoners held in Israeli jails. Many of the detainees are often subjected to psychological pressure and physical torture. Forced isolation, administrative detention, sudden night checks and interrogations, restrictions on internal movement and overcrowding have had a highly traumatic effect on the detainees. The Palestinian prisoners also face a lack of religious and educational facilities. The health situation is a cause for great concern. Many suffer from various diseases and surgical operations are frequently delayed. Palestinian prisoners under 18 are exposed to physical assaults by Israeli criminal prisoners with whom they are often jailed. Since the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifada, the Israeli authorities have deprived the detainees of their right to family visitations. In addition, lawyers from the areas under Palestinian Authority control have been denied access to Palestinian prisoners since 8 April 1996. Legal assistance and advice are made unavailable to the Palestinian prisoners as a result of this policy. On a

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number of occasions, the Committee has called on the Government of Israel to abide by its obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention and to release the prisoners in implementation of the bilateral agreements.

27. The Palestinian economy, in the year of the current intifada, has experienced extreme difficulties and has shown signs of rapid disintegration as a result of the Israeli military occupation. Months of intensive violence and military confrontation as well as protracted closures and restrictions on the movement of goods and the labour force have decimated practically all sectors of the economy. In contrast to previous years, there has been a noticeable shift to emergency assistance and humanitarian aid. Since the beginning of the crisis in September 2000, the Israeli authorities have introduced a policy of recurrent and often prolonged closures, which is viewed as a particularly harsh form of collective punishment. Mobility has been severely restricted on the borders between the Palestinian Territory and Israel, between the West Bank and Jordan, and between the Gaza Strip and Egypt. The closure of borders with Israel has resulted in the closure of the safe passage route established as part of the peace negotiations. Internal closures within the West Bank and Gaza Strip have led to the establishment of a dense network of Israeli checkpoints, which, in turn, has resulted in temporary or permanent traffic disruption and road blockages. The present crisis has considerably offset the gains made by the Palestinian economy in the past several years. Estimates by the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority indicate that the total income losses of the Palestinian economy since the start of the intifada range from US\$ 1.8 to US\$ 2.5 billion. The closures have caused a dramatic rise in unemployment, bringing the rates back to the 1996 levels. Poverty rates were expected to reach 50 per cent by the end of 2001, meaning that half of the Palestinian population would live on \$2 or less a day. The IDF incursions into Palestinian-controlled areas have had a destructive effect on the Palestinian physical infrastructure. Palestinian social services have also been disrupted. The Committee was of the view that in the light of the gravity of the economic crisis and in order to address the situation adequately, the international community would have to renew its commitment to assist the Palestinian people with a view to rehabilitating the economy and infrastructure and bringing about a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the Palestinians. Also in this connection, the Committee stressed the increasingly important role of the United Nations system and the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority in coordinating international assistance and emergency humanitarian aid.

28. As was the case in the previous years, water in the Occupied Palestinian Territory remained in short supply. Constant water shortages continued to have a harmful effect of Palestinian households throughout the Palestinian territory. Israeli authorities continued to exercise control over Palestinian water resources, with thousands of Palestinian families deprived of connection to water networks. Almost 200,000 Palestinians were forced to rely on alternative water sources. The pervasive restrictions on movement imposed by Israel on the Palestinian population during the intifada, coupled with a sharp deterioration of the economy, have further impeded access by Palestinians to sources of water supply. Restrictive and repressive Israeli actions in the course of the year have affected the water supply situation. During the closures of the Palestinian territory, IDF often prevented Palestinian traffic,

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including water tanks, from reaching their water suppliers. Settlers have been reported to use their bulldozers to rupture Palestinian water pipelines, whereas Israeli snipers have targeted Palestinian roof water tanks, considered by the Palestinians as an essential alternative to relying on water pipelines.

29. The Committee greatly appreciated and supported the substantial humanitarian work done during the year by the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA). UNRWA has provided some 3.8 million Palestine refugees with social services, schooling and health care. In spite of its important and dedicated humanitarian effort, the Agency continued to experience serious financial difficulties. The severe decline in the Palestinian economy and the desperate condition of Palestine refugees since the start of the intifada in particular compelled UNRWA to launch a series of emergency appeals to the international community for funds to be used for emergency operations. In all its activities during the year, the Committee has consistently called for increased international support for the Agency's vital activities and generous financial contributions to its budget. It has also supported UNRWA's appeals for aid to provide food, medical supplies and emergency work programmes for some 217,000 refugee families.

30. Since December 1978, the Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP/PAPP) has provided substantial assistance to the Palestinian people. For over two decades, UNDP/PAPP has helped build Palestinian technical capacities, as well as project management and administrative capacities within counterpart Palestinian institutions, including the Palestinian Authority, local government, the private sector and non-governmental organizations. The Committee has been grateful to UNDP/PAPP for the invaluable and highly effective development assistance rendered to the Palestinian people during these difficult years.

V. Action taken by the Committee

A. Action taken in accordance with General Assembly resolution 55/52

31. In pursuance of its mandate and in response to the difficulties experienced by the peace process and in the search for a comprehensive, just and lasting settlement of the question of Palestine, the Committee continued to mobilize the international community in support of the Palestinian people, in cooperation with United Nations bodies, Governments, intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and others, as indicated below.

1. Action in the General Assembly and the Security Council

(a) Resumed tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly

32. The Chairman, as well as members and observers of the Committee, participated in the fifth assumption of the tenth emergency special session of the General Assembly, convened to discuss the item entitled "Illegal Israeli actions in occupied East Jerusalem and the rest of the Occupied Palestinian Territory". In pursuance of General Assembly resolution ES-10/6 of 9 February 1999, the emergency

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special session was resumed on 18 October 2000 at the request of the Permanent Representative of Iraq to the United Nations, in his capacity as Chairman of the Group of Arab States for the month of October 2000.

33. The Chairman of the Committee took part in the debate and made a statement, in which he reviewed the situation on the ground and the international efforts to resume the peace negotiations at Sharm el-Sheikh. He also welcomed the particularly important role which the United Nations Secretary-General had played in efforts to bring an end to the violence (A/ES-10/PV.13).

34. At the 14th meeting of the session, on 20 October 2000, the Secretary-General made a statement on the latest developments on the item (A/ES-10/PV.14). At the end of the debate, on 20 October 2000, the General Assembly, by a recorded vote of 92 to 6, with 46 abstentions, adopted resolution ES-10/7, in which it condemned the violence that had taken place on 28 September 2000 and the following days at Al-Haram al-Sharif and other Holy Places in Jerusalem as well as other areas in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, resulting in the deaths of over 100 people, the vast majority of whom were Palestinian civilians, and many other casualties; condemned also acts of violence, especially the excessive use of force by the Israeli forces against Palestinian civilians; expressed support for the understandings reached at the summit convened at Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, and urged all parties concerned to implement those understandings honestly and without delay; demanded the immediate cessation of violence and the use of force, called upon the parties to act immediately to reverse all measures taken in that regard since 28 September 2000, and acknowledged that necessary steps had been taken by the parties in that direction since the summit of Sharm el-Sheikh; reiterated that Israeli settlements in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, were illegal and were an obstacle to peace, and called for the prevention of illegal acts of violence by Israeli settlers; demanded that Israel, the occupying Power, abide scrupulously by its legal obligations and its responsibilities under the Fourth Geneva Convention relative to the Protection of Civilian Persons in Time of War, which was applicable to all territories occupied by Israel since 1967; strongly supported the establishment of a mechanism of inquiry into the recent tragic events, with the aim of establishing all the precise facts and preventing the repetition of those events, and in that regard strongly supported also the understanding reached at Sharm el-Sheikh about a committee of fact-finding, and called for its establishment without delay; supported the efforts of the Secretary-General, including his efforts for the establishment of the above-mentioned committee, and requested him to report to the Assembly on the progress made in those efforts; called upon the members of the Security Council to follow the situation closely, including the implementation of Council resolution 1322 (2000), in fulfilment of the Council's primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security; invited the depositary of the Fourth Geneva Convention to consult on the development of the humanitarian situation in the field, in accordance with the statement adopted on 15 July 1999 by the Conference of High Contracting Parties to the Convention, with the aim of ensuring respect for the Convention in all circumstances in accordance with common article 1 of the four Conventions; supported the efforts towards the resumption of the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in the Middle East peace process on its agreed basis, and called for the speedy conclusion of the final settlement agreement between the two sides; and decided to adjourn the tenth emergency special session temporarily and to authorize the President of the General Assembly at its most recent session to

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resume its meeting upon request from Member States.

(Security Council meetings

35. Following the events of 28 September 2000 and the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa intifadah that ensued, the Security Council met on 3, 4 and 5 October 2000 to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". At its 4205th meeting on 7 October 2000, the Council adopted resolution 1322 (2000).⁷

36. On 22 November 2000, at the request of the Permanent Representative of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya to the United Nations in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of November 2000 (S/2000/1109), the Security Council met to discuss the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

37. The Acting Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate on the same day and made a statement on behalf of the Committee. In his statement, the Acting Chairman underscored the very important role played by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in the search for a solution to the crisis. On behalf of the Committee, he urged the Secretary-General to continue his efforts. The Acting Chairman also emphasized that Israeli practices and policies denying the legitimate needs and aspirations of the Palestinian people would never be compatible with a legitimate peace process based on resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973). There could be no just and lasting peace in the Middle East until the Palestinian people exercised their legitimate right to establish an independent State with its capital in East Jerusalem, until all the occupied Arab territories were returned, and until Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip, the West Bank and the occupied Syrian Golan, to the lines of 4 June 1967 (S/PV.4231).

38. On 18 December 2000, the Security Council met again to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question" (S/2000/1206). At the end of the debate on the same day, the Council voted on a draft resolution (S/2000/1171) submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement Caucus (Bangladesh, Jamaica, Malaysia, Mali, Namibia and Tunisia). The draft received 8 votes in favour, none against and 7 abstentions. The draft resolution was not adopted, as it did not obtain the required majority (S/PV.4248).

39. On 15 March 2001, at the request of the Permanent Representative of the United Arab Emirates to the United Nations in his capacity as Chairman of the Arab Group for the month of March 2001 (S/2001/216), the Security Council met to consider the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question". Resumed meetings under this item were held on 19 and 27 March 2001. At the conclusion of the debate, on 27 March 2001, the Council voted on a draft resolution (S/2001/270) submitted by the Non-Aligned Movement Caucus (Bangladesh, Colombia, Jamaica, Mali, Mauritius, Singapore and Tunisia). The draft received 9 votes in favour, 1 against and 4 abstentions. One Council member did not participate in the voting. The draft resolution was not adopted owing to the

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negative vote of a permanent member of the Security Council (S/PV.4305).

At the request of the representatives of Mali and Qatar to the United Nations (S/2001/797), on 20 and 21 August 2001, the Security Council resumed its consideration of the agenda item entitled "The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question".

41. The Acting Chairman of the Committee participated in the debate on 20 August 2001 and made a statement on behalf of the Committee. In his statement, the Acting Chairman expressed the concern of the Committee at the dramatic escalation of tension and violence in and around East Jerusalem and in areas under full Palestinian control. He stated that Israel had no intentions of abiding by agreements signed with the Palestinian side and had firmly decided on wide-scale military operations in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including Jerusalem, as well as in areas under full control of the Palestinian Authority. The Acting Chairman specifically referred to Israel's takeover of Orient House and other Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem and Abu Dis. He added that the Security Council had on numerous occasions failed to take any tangible action in response to the situation on the ground. The Committee believed that the Mitchell Committee report and its recommendations should be implemented in their entirety. A framework for their implementation should be established within a reasonable time span and with the international community monitoring the compliance of both parties. Negotiations on security, as well as consideration of the interim and permanent status issues, should be revived as a matter of urgency. The Acting Chairman said that the Committee was of the view that a permanent status agreement, long overdue, should be finally reached on the basis of Security Council resolutions 242 (1967) and 338 (1973) (S/PV.4357).

2. Communications to the Secretary-General, the President of the General Assembly and the President of the Security Council

42. In a letter dated 7 March 2001 addressed to the Secretary-General (A/55/827, A/ES-10/62-S/2001/207), the Chairman of the Committee voiced great concern at the continuing violence on the ground and the use of deadly force by the Israeli army and security forces. He said that Israel continued to rely on the use of massive armed response to individual outbreaks of Palestinian protest throughout the Occupied Palestinian Territory. The Chairman added that the Committee wished to join the rest of the international community in its indignation over the Israeli practice of extrajudicial killings by Israeli security forces of the members of the Palestinian leadership and other Palestinian officials, stating that this policy was contrary to the rule of international law, provoked further violence, led to a crisis of trust and confidence between the two sides and created new obstacles to peace. The Committee was of the view that, with the situation continuing to deteriorate, the international community should act by stepping up its efforts to ensure the protection of the Palestinian people. The Committee also strongly believed that the status quo was absolutely untenable and was firmly rooted in Israel's continued violation of the principles of the Fourth Geneva Convention and the provisions of relevant Security Council and General Assembly resolutions. By its actions, Israel had clearly demonstrated its unwillingness to respect the bilateral agreements and understandings reached to date. The Committee viewed with particular concern the dangerously rapid disintegration of the Palestinian economy as a

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